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TAGS: [PREL](#) [ASEC](#) [PTER](#) [GA](#) [LE](#)
SUBJECT: THE GAMBIA: UPDATE ON REACTION TO MIDEAST VIOLENCE

REF: A. BANJUL 459 ET AL

[1](#)B. BANJUL 439

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOSEPH STAFFORD, REASON 1.4 (D)

PRESIDENT JAMMEH SPEAKS OUT

[1](#)1. (U) Following the resident Lebanese community's July 18 statement denouncing Israel for the ongoing Mideast violence (reftel), President Jammeh has also condemned the Israelis. In a televised statement marking the anniversary of his 1994 coup, Jammeh expressed concern over the clashes, but portrayed them as "Israeli aggression." Omitting any mention of the U.S., Jammeh expressed sympathy for "Lebanese and Palestinian" victims and called for UN intervention to halt the fighting.

JOINT STATEMENT WITH IVOIRIAN LEADER

[1](#)2. (C) The topic of Mideast violence also surfaced in a joint communique issued at the close of the July 21-23 visit here by Cote d'Ivoire's President, Laurent Gbagbo. In a perfunctory statement devoid of anti-Israeli criticism, the two leaders registered concern over the violence and called on "all sides" to exercise restraint and pursue a "peaceful and lasting solution." They also "reaffirmed their condemnation of terrorism everywhere in the world." In brief comment to Ambassador, Ivoirian Foreign Minister Bakayoko took credit for the relatively mild tenor of the communique, saying that, during its drafting, he had insisted to the Gambians that there be "no criticism of anyone" over the Mideast fighting.

OVERALL GAMBIAN REACTION REMAINS SUBDUED

[1](#)3. (C) The Gambian President's and Lebanese community's statements notwithstanding, our contacts indicate that the Mideast turmoil has yet to gain much traction with the Gambian public generally. Meanwhile, coverage in the local media is, for the most part, factual and drawn from foreign wire service reports. However, the journal "Daily Observer," which serves as the GOTG's mouthpiece, featured an editorial July 24 endorsing Jammeh's criticism of Israel and accusing it of "the most heinous and barbaric treatment of Lebanon and Palestine." Referring to "the continuous killing and maiming of innocent Muslims," the author echoed Jammeh's call for UN intervention.

COMMENT

[1](#)4. (C) At this point, we judge that Jammeh's statement -- and his denunciation of Israel -- likely represents a gesture to the local Lebanese community rather than a manifestation of sharply rising concern over the Mideast crisis among

Gambians. However, the statement is also consistent with the less moderate foreign policy moves by Jammeh of late -- as highlighted by his reaching out to Iran and Venezuela (ref b) -- as part of his anti-U.S. reaction following the suspension of The Gambia's MCA eligibility. While we continue to judge that the Mideast crisis is not likely to generate anti-U.S. protests or other threats to U.S. interests, careful monitoring remains in order. END COMMENT.
STAFFORD